fool me once

By: rumiberri

shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. [Set after Anime finale][No Rebellion][Two-shot]

Rated: Fiction T - English - Homura A. - Chapters: 2 - Words: 3,037 - Reviews: 16 - Favs: 19 - Follows: 4 - Updated: Apr 6 - Published: Apr 2 - Status: Complete - id: 10236756

She's not sure what it is, but as the snow slowly melts and winter starts preparing for spring, she finds herself growing almost nostalgic as she makes her way through the city.

It takes her a few days when she finally realizes the reason why.

It has almost been a year since Madoka became a mere whisper on her lips; the only remaining trace of her is the bright red ribbon tied in her hair that still remains perfect to this very day.

The demons are still prevalent and Mami and Kyouko are still alive.

And Homura finds that a year lasts a very, very long time.

\\

The classroom is filled with the normal chatter of students as she takes her seat. She is in the process of setting her things down and pulling out her laptop when two classmates approach her.

"Akemi-san!"

She gives them a friendly smile; it's what Madoka would've done, anyways.

"Yes? Did you need something?" Her voice is quiet, as always.

"Uhm. We were wondering if you wanted to join us for flower viewing? The cherry blossoms will be blooming soon and there's this really great spot and last year you weren't here yet but uhm—"

Her friend elbows her in the side and it reminds Homura of Sayaka and—

"It's this weekend! You don't have to bring anything! Would you like to join us? There will be others from our class as well!"

Homura pauses, looking thoughtful but suddenly her face falls. "I apologize. I already have plans for that weekend..."

It's not a real lie; she always has plans.

Demon hunting is an endless plan, after all.

"Oh."

The two girls look disappointed but they give her another smile. "Maybe next time?"

She nods. "Yes, I really am sorry..."

Her apologetic face has them shaking their heads and they hold out their hands. "N-No! Don't feel bad. We're sorry for asking you so last minute! Uhm... m-maybe we could go some place else, later? We'll be sure to ask you at least two weeks in advance!"

She smiles her soft smile again and nods. "Yes. That sounds lovely. Thank you."

They both blush at her gentle expression and quickly bow before turning to leave.

Even without her enhanced hearing, she can hear them squeal and whisper words that makes Homura's face warm and she distracts herself by turning back to finish her task of pulling out her laptop.

\

"Yo, Homura!" Kyouko greets her with a wave and Homura nods in acknowledgement; their standard greeting.

"Akemi-san." Mami is polite as ever and Homura glances at her before she leads the way as they start their daily patrol.

Their footsteps play as background noise and finally Mami breaks the silence as she turns to Kyouko who is walking next to her; Homura is up ahead but she knows that Mami is talking to her as well.

"A few of my classmates... I overheard them talking about going cherry blossom viewing this weekend..."

Mami always did like that semblance of normalcy; it was what made her different in this world than in the previous.

"And... well, I was wondering if perhaps we should do the same?"

Homura doesn't reply nor do her steps waver.

"I mean... on our own," Mami clarifies since she knows of Homura's reluctance to participate in activities involving large crowds. "A flower viewing with just us girls."

Kyouko shrugs. "If there's food, I'm in. Homura?"

This is how their discussions always worked: Mami would suggest something, Kyouko would agree and she would ask Homura once more.

For some reason, she always seemed to tolerate Kyouko more and though Mami has never understood why, she has slowly learned to accept it though Homura is starting to warm up to her, somewhat.

If a blizzard is considered warm compared to an iceberg, that is.

Regardless, Homura glances behind her and lavender eyes can see a pair of golden eyes looking at her—she sucks in a sharp breath—but, the shade is not as bright and definitely not the same—and she turns back to face ahead.

"...Only if it won't interfere with our patrol," she tells them quietly and Mami smiles lightly.

"Tch, 'all work and no play makes Homura a dull girl,'" Kyouko recites though her voice is teasing.

Homura ignores them and suddenly her gem glows brighter. "We're close."

The mood flips and their faces are serious as they spot the miasma in the air.

/There you girls are. The area is clear of humans/

Kyuubey lands on Homura's shoulder and she suppresses the urge to shudder, merely transforming into her magical outfit.

"Let's go." Discoloured wings emerge from her back and she leaps into the air.

"...You ever wish you could fly, Mami?" Kyouko asks as they follow Homura through the streets.

Mami watches as Homura's figure soars higher and above. "I think... I'm fine with staying on the ground, Kyouko. A caged bird wishes to fly —but once it does, it doesn't exactly mean it'll understand where to go."

Kyouko turns to look at her. "...Yeah."

They both agreed on that—Homura could fly to wherever she wanted.

But what did that mean when she always seemed so lost?

\\

The days are filled like always; school and patrols, polite words and lonely nights.

The path to school blooms and as she walks, petals flutter into the air —*pink*—and she finds the emptiness in her heart grow with longing.

Madoka.

It keeps her up at night and catches up to her during the day.

"Damnit Homura! If you're going to fight so carelessly why don't you just stay at home instead of getting in our way!"

Kyouko's anger hides her worry as she stares at Homura who is missing her right arm and Mami is frantically trying her best to stop the bleeding with her ribbons as she helps reconnect the appendage.

"...Sorry," Homura merely tells her, bowing her head.

Apologies are rare and it's enough to drive out the rest of Kyouko's anger.

"Whatever. Geez. After Mami heals you, go home."

Wordlessly, Homura closes her eyes as she feels the bones and tissue meld together.

"...Alright."

Her quiet agreement has Mami and Kyouko exchanging worried glances.

/

Their flower viewing party is quiet and Mami makes enough food to feed an army, meaning it's enough to satisfy Kyouko's almost insatiable appetite.

The air twists around them and the flowers are in full bloom; they have located a secluded place where it's just them and Homura stares distractedly into the blue sky, eyes distant as they take in the pink all around.

She sees her more often now—in her dreams. As she wakes. As she walks.

In the trees; the cherry blossoms shades lighter than her hair.

But she sees—*it's all she sees*.

A finger is snapped in front of her eyes and she blinks.

"Hey, try some of this," Kyouko tells her, holding out an onigiri in front of her face.

Homura stares, hand reaching because she knows Kyouko won't take no as an answer but her hand is pushed down.

"Say 'Ahh.'"

"..."

"Ahhh," Kyouko repeats as she waves the onigiri around.

"..."

"Ahhh." This time more forcefully.

"...Ahh."

The onigiri is pushed to her mouth and she takes an obedient bite.

It's delicious, like all of Mami's foods usually are, but she can't taste anything.

"Good, huh?" Kyouko grins at her. "Ahhh."

It's finally enough to bring a blush to Homura's cheeks and she shoves the hand holding the onigiri away.

"I can feed myself, thank you."

Wordlessly, Kyouko stuffs the rest of the onigiri into her own mouth and points to the containers of food.

Homura knows what she means and she sighs softly before eying the selection. A twinge of pain in her heart when she spots pink—and she quickly reaches for an onigiri instead.

"Told you it's good," Kyouko nods to her as she licks her fingers.

"Would you like some more tea, Akemi-san?" Mami asks as she holds out the teapot.

Silently, Homura lifts her cup and watches as the hot liquid is poured.

"Thank you," she murmurs softly and Mami nods at her.

"The cherry blossoms are beautiful, aren't they?" Mami comments as she looks up to the tree that fills their sight overhead.

Homura glances above, face unreadable.

"...Yes. Very much," she agrees quietly.

/

She's not sure what it is, but she wakes with a pounding heart and a feeling that something is there, waiting for her.

She crawls out of bed, transforming into her outfit and exits through her balcony, taking flight on discoloured wings through the darkened sky.

It's the middle of the night and she's searching for something as the city sleeps.

There's school tomorrow and patrol after that but something calls to her and somehow she finds herself in the park, cherry blossoms still bloomed all around.

The moonlight is enough and she can see the pink clearly.

A gust of wind whips her hair around her and she hurriedly brushes strands away from her eyes, face tilted upwards as a shower of petals fall into her view.

Pink.

"Madoka...?"

She can see her clearly—pink hair, pink eyes. Familiar, soft. Kind.

"Madoka!"

"...Homura-chan."

Her voice rings and echoes through her ears.

"Madoka!"

She's reaching out for her now—desperately—as the petals scatter around her fingertips.

"Madoka!"

A burst of yellow light and she turns with widened eyes as Mami steps into view, Kyouko following behind her.

"Akemi-san!"

"Oy! Homura!"

Tears stain her cheeks and she realizes she's standing knee deep in miasma.

A blink and the fog surrounds her as figures loom overhead.

A painful swipe and all she knows is darkness.

\\

She wakes with a groan and a dull pain to her head.

Lavender eyes stare into the familiar ceiling—home. A glance around and blankets are draped over her like the confusion surrounding her mind.

She remembers—the night. The park.

Her eyes widen.

Madoka.

She scrambles up and her legs entangle into her blankets, sending her tumbling onto the floor. Her chin knocks hard onto the carpet and she lays there for a moment, dazed, waiting for her magic to heal the pain away.

Her movements are slower now; more tentative as her mind slowly wakes.

She sits up.

"Madoka...?"

There's no reply and her quiet voice fades into the background.

She looks around and suddenly her eyes fall onto the calendar pinned to her wall. The date makes her heart clench but gradually the pain disappears and merely sinks deeper into her soul.

She closes her eyes, a lone tear trailing down her cheek as she realizes the truth.

"I see... I... am such a fool."

Her throat closes and she chokes heavily, sobs now heard in her lone room.

April 1st.

April fool**s.**

As the weather warms and the flowers continue to bloom, a subtle change falls over Homura.

Like scattered dust in the wind, it seeps deep into broken cracks that are invisible to the naked eye.

Her smile remains the same. Her personality, untouched.

It starts slowly.

A missed day.

Two.

Excused absences due to her health.

Sleepless nights and missed patrols.

Darkened circles permanently etched under her eyes.

Haunted visions that constantly dance in her mind.

Mami recognizes it and hovers nearby, worried but afraid to step over bounds.

Kyouko sees it and tries a more direct approach.

Bleeding wounds and bruised bodies later, they lay, side by side. Exhausted, but still very much alive.

Mami rushes towards them, grief cubes pulled out, intent on cleaning their gems.

Intent on healing their tattered souls.

Kyouko stubbornly sits up by herself and Homura struggles to do the same. Her once again missing arm makes it difficult and Mami is there, gently helping her.

Homura's face softens and she gives them both a smile. "Thank you."

They take it as a sign; she's getting better.

The days turn into nights and suddenly, when the month ends, they find she's no longer there.

April turns into May.

And Homura is gone.

\\

She wanders aimlessly, wings taking her where her legs cannot.

The city reminds her too much of Madoka and she finds she cannot stay.

She constantly searches for things not pink. Not Madoka.

Finally finding it in pale brown.

In the deserts, where the humidity soaks her skin. Temperatures far beyond what she's used to—except, no pink.

No Madoka.

The demons are out here as well, fueling her magic; keeping her alive.

Barely, if just.

Hallucinations haunt her instead—wavering in the heat, flickering like mirages in the sand.

Mami is always there, always hopeful. Always asking for her to return.

Kyouko growling at her, offering her food.

Madoka is—

Madoka is nowhere.

And nowhere is where Homura wants to be.

/

She stands on a large dune, unaffected as the sand dances around her.

A sandstorm. She in the midst of it.

A small barrier to protect her body and she tilts her head, watching as the grains whirl and float away.

How long has she been here?

How long has she been gone?

The only remaining trace of hope left in her—is the red ribbon still tied in her hair.

Even after all this time, she cannot bear to let it fly away.

The healing twinge on her face evidence of her reluctance to let go.

Maybe… Maybe, she should head back now.

Maybe.

Lavender eyes stare blankly into the now clearing sky.

The sand has seeped in—and maybe the dust has burned away.

Darkened wings emerge from her back.

Maybe…

\

She arrives in Mitakihara past midnight, her own mental clock placing the time in between 2am and 3am. She's not sure, but she also doesn't really seem to care.

She lands at the top of a high rise building, one that gives her the clearest view of the city. The familiar lights blink and glow all around her. She finds she has missed this place, and the longing in her heart subsides, ever so slightly.

Something calls out to her and without another glance, she leaps high. Her wings burst forth, taking her to her new destination.

/

A park.

The trees—are bare.

She looks up, eyes scanning the branches and she finds—no pink.

The season is over and the cherry blossoms are gone.

The end of May.

"Homura-chan."

The familiar voice still haunting her and she turns around.

She sees her—that familiar pink. Those kind eyes. A long, flowing white dress.

She remains staring as Madoka steps out from behind the tree, sad smile on her lips.

"Where did you go? I was... waiting for you," Madoka tells her.

The words catch in her throat. Where? Where did she go?

She doesn't know.

"Who are you?" she croaks out, voice dry and as cracked as the deserts she had abandoned. "Why are you here?"

"Homura-chan..." Madoka stops, hesitance on her face. "You... don't remember me?"

"Why can't you leave me alone?" she whispers instead and she realizes that she's crying. This vision in front of her has already broken her and she realizes that maybe it's she who can't let go. "Why... why can't I just forget you?"

She collapses on her knees, hands gripping the dirt desperately. "Why can't you leave me alone?" she sobs painfully. "Is this my punishment? For trying to save a friend?"

There's no reply and she hopes—wishes—that the hallucination is gone.

White enters her vision and the scent—like strawberries.

She raises her head as arms surround her, enclosing her in a warm embrace.

"Homura-chan... please don't cry. I'm sorry. I'm really, really, sorry."

Pink—it's all she sees.

Pink—

That insufferable shade of pink.

She shoves her away. This stranger who's pretending to be her salvation.

This stranger who's—

—pretending to be Madoka.

She summons her bow in her hands and though her vision remains blurry, she stands and points her weapon at pink.

At Madoka.

"You're not real," she whispers, arms trembling. "You're not real. Madoka doesn't exist anymore. Madoka is not here!"

She releases the arrow and waits.

Waits, for the figure to disappear. For the miasma to evaporate. For her demons to finally rest.

What she finds instead is pink.

Pink.

Always pink.

"Homura-chan."

The bow disappears and she shuts her eyes.

"No! No! You're not real! Madoka is—Madoka is gone!"

This time, she's enveloped completely in warmth.

"I'm right here, Homura-chan. I'm right here."

"No," she sobs desperately. If she gives in—she knows it's the end. "No," she repeats. "No. No! No! You're not real!"

She tries with all her strength and finds she cannot push her away. This stranger, this pink.

"Why..." she whispers softly. "Why won't you leave me alone...?"

"Because I promised," Madoka tells her. "I promised I'd come back for you, Homura-chan."

That voice and her warmth.

Her sobs echo loudly as she buries her face deep into pink.

"Shh, it's okay, Homura-chan."

Fingers thread through her hair and soft kisses pressed onto her head.

"Shh, I'm right here, Homura-chan. I'm right here."

\

She wakes with a heavy feeling and an emptiness in her heart.

Lavender eyes stare into the familiar ceiling—home. A glance around and blankets are draped over her like the confusion surrounding her mind.

She remembers—the night. The park.

Her eyes close.

Madoka.

Tears gather and she angrily brushes them away.

Madoka is—

A sound cuts off her thoughts and she sits up abruptly. Lavender eyes open and—

"Homura-chan? Are you awake yet?"

The door opens and in steps—

*Pin**k.***